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ABSTRACT

In this review of literature, the researchers draw upon the history of politics and education as they overlap in society. Politikverdrossenheit is defined as disillusionment with politics in education and society, a concept researchers feel is unproductive. The development of the collective social and educational system is traced through the stages of: (1) Individuals as Political by Nature; (2) Politics of Social Justice; (3) Postmodernism: Celebration of Diversity; (4) Politics of Evaluation; (5) Politics of Reform Reports; and (6) Individuals as Political Animals. The political bent of individuals to enhance the quality of communications, self-esteem and self-worth of others, is advocated in order to build consensus and create an improved society. (EH)

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Politikverdrossenheit and the Future of Education

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Individuals as Political by Nature

Aristotle noted that man is by nature a political animal. Institutions reflect the need for individuals to live in a community. The individual when isolated is not self sufficient. Polity is a mean, a constitution in which a balance is achieved between the rule of the many and the rule of the few, between the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor. (1) Cremin (2) notes that education has always served political functions as it affects or is believed or intended to affect the future character of the community and state. As Aristotle noted, it is impossible to talk about education apart from some conception of the good life; individuals will inevitably differ in their conceptions of the good life, and hence they will inevitably disagree on matters of education; therefore the discussion of politics falls unavoidably within the domain of politics (Cremin:85).

Collective organizational life is that of politics. In groups, out groups, turf defense, us against them, reflect the perpetual challenge of institutional life. In all institutions, at all levels, the game of politics is part of the culture of all educational levels, in all locations, whether public or private. Power centers shift, persuasive, articulate individuals can often make the worse case the winning one as did the Greek Sophists.

Dewey and Counts saw the school as a place for social reconstruction. Counts' question "Dare the School Build a New Social Order?" was a call to encourage youth to form a

more viable, responsible, and responsive social order. Providing models for good citizenship through shared values and consensus was a foundation for the social reconstructionists. For Dewey the school was a miniature society. The problems of society were reflected in the issues facing youth. The pragmatists expanded the traditional concept of schooling to include a continuing consciousness raising about the necessity for economic and social justice. Dewey and other progressives of his era stressed the importance of political involvement to inform the populace about the needs, issues and problems of education as well as to continually reconstruct the individual and society.

Politics of Social Justice

The politics of social justice has been deeply intertwined with education of youth as witness the increasing number of programs designed to help those individuals at risk. School lunch, health care, transportation assistance, food stamps, summer camps, affirmative action programs, assistance to those physically and emotionally challenged are but a few illustrations of the political action programs for the nation's youth. The current Clinton Administration is continuing the social and economic justice programs with aid to single parents, national service legislation for students desirous of attending higher education institutions and volunteer programs for assisting the geriatically challenged generation.

Working to assist an increasing number of immigrants with a variety of programs to orient them to American culture is seen in business/industry education programs. English-as-a second-language program is part and parcel of the educational effort of business as it

works to integrate immigrants into the mainstream of worklife. Tyson Company, one of the nation's largest chicken processing companies, as others throughout the country, provides language and citizenship training in company classrooms during the regular workday.

The politics of global education is a continuing saga in America as witness the work of Frederick Taylor who developed a theory of *Scientific Management* in the early 1900s to make American workers competitive in world markets. In the 1950s, the Russians led the world in space exploration with Sputnik. Within a few months, Congress passed a National Science Education Act to encourage students to work in the physical sciences so that we could regain a competitive edge in space exploration. In the 1980s, *The Nation At Risk* stressed improvement of education in order to make our youth competitive with others throughout the world. In addition, the report stressed the vital necessity of providing the quality of education needed to make our workforce competitive in the world markets.

Many reform reports in education deal specifically with market competitiveness. On the other hand, there are continuing reports such as Glacier's *Schools Without Failure* that stress love, worth and recognition. The work for affirmative action, for assisting students at risk to gain self worth and self esteem speak to a cooperative thrust in society. For some, this would suggest mixed messages in education. On the one hand our stress is toward competitiveness in world markets, while on the other hand the push is toward

assisting individuals with special needs. However the messages are political in the sense that hard work, effort, achievement meets the goals of the powerful military/industrial complex in the United States while the goals of social compassion meet the needs of those in the populace who need governmental support in order to survive with dignity. The social compassion goals serve the age old need of social control. Preventing food riots, theft, vandalism, attack on life and property of those in better financial straits, alleviating the source of jealousy, resentment and eventual hatred of those more fortunate are the political goals of social assistance programs.

As Horace Mann (3) noted, addressing both political goals:

> ...education has a market value; that it is so far an article of merchandise, that it may be turned to pecuniary account; it may be minted, and will yield a larger amount of statuable coin than common bullion.... The aim of industry is served, and the wealth of the country is augmented, in proportion to the diffusion of knowledge.

Mann then proposed a *Stewardship Theory of Wealth,* suggesting that those who were blessed by material wealth and goods have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide for the schooling of those less fortunate. This was his recognition of the necessity of meeting the needs of those with limited skills and limited financial resources to compete effectively in the marketplace.

Current Tensions Within Educational Systems

A survey of the current literature on politics and education reveals a number of concerns and issues among educators about the direction of politics as it influences education.

Postmodernism: Celebration of Diversity

Kerr (4) finds that some aspects of the ethics of the academic profession are disintegrating slowly and that mutual trust within the community is eroding. He notes that political and financial influences are seen to be largely responsible for this decline.

Issues of unequal education and marginalized members of various minority groups have recently been explored in the literature of education. Postmodernists seek a deepening consciousness of inequalities, contradictions and neglect within institutions. They seek a curriculum that can provoke people to reach past themselves and be recognized. (5)

Currently postmodernism highlights the tensions between capitalism and democracy. Brosio, and Margonis (6) find that the tensions of heterogeneity and confusion in educational systems can be dealt with by understanding that capitalism and democracy are profoundly different and oppositional logics. One emphasizes competition and the other seeks consensus, shared values and cooperation. As Aristotle noted it is always important to find a sense of balance or *Golden Mean* with social system to provide for order and consistency. Apple (7) finds that ideology or politics behind current educational

justifications for a national curriculum and national testing can damage members of society who have the most to lose. He analyzes the differential benefits of such national educational trends.

Politics of Evaluation

Mercer (8) finds higher education increasingly facing challenges from state legislators. He finds state legislators may be seen as allies for bringing issues to the forefront and as foes for their strident criticism of higher education. This criticism tends to focus on accountability vs. autonomy. In Florida and many others states, tenure is under attack in legislatures. Accountability demands often result in inappropriate bureaucratic mandates for faculty evaluation. Public schools and universities need better public relations to inform the electorate of the value of funding reform. Often accountability legislative mandates are met by increasing student evaluation of instructors. Platt, Weissberg and Young (9) writing in *Perspectives on Political Science*, note that virtually every U.S. university uses standardized teacher/course evaluation forms which have become a ritual. They find that standardized teacher evaluation forms belittle students by blending them into an anonymous mass and emphasize that writing is unimportant. They note that rather than increasing students' influence, teacher evaluations enhance administrators' power and pose a danger to intellectual freedom. Platt, Weissberg, and Young argue that many good teachers are unrewarded while ineffective ones win prizes, and the evaluation process is often a means of monitoring political orthodoxy. Young finds that student evaluation of teacher performance has lowered the quality of U.S. education noting that assessment instruments used to assess teacher performance are not only limited in effectiveness but

are also used as an instrument of intimidation to force conformity to politically correct standards.

Politics of Reform Reports

Michael Apple and others have referred to a hidden agenda, a hidden curriculum in reports delineating weaknesses in American education. Tanner (10) believes that many of America's 2000 proposals should be challenged by educators, in view of powerful and readily available sources, including the Sandia Report suppressed by the Bush Administration. The Sandia research identified aggregate SAT, NAEP and GRE scores as rising; dropout rates as declining (except for Hispanics); and beginning teachers' salaries (in constant dollars) resembling 1970s salaries.

These various concerns reflect the politics of controversy in education that have made up our History of American Education. General education vs. specialization; role of religion in education and curriculum content have led to differences of opinion throughout our cycles of educational change. Jeffersonian democracy stressed meritocracy for society and education. This is reflected in many reform reports and educational practices in 1994 as various devices including standardized test scores, and increasing bureaucratic requirements are utilized to proclaim higher educational standards. Jacksonian democracy was based on egalitarianism which stressed opening the doors of educational institutions to everyone regardless of background or talent. This is reflected in 1994 in various programs to allow for deviance from standardized measures for increasing the availability of education including SAT scores and various other measures of excellence. Special

financial assistance programs for those with special needs, special degree programs for those unable to meet regular education requirements, and variance or deviance procedures to provide assistance to students at risk such as remedial math, English, and science programs. These programs are available at all educational institutions from the ivory tower schools of the East to state colleges and universities as well as community colleges.

Currently there are many perceived political issues in outcomes based education. Many concerned citizens feel that the outcomes movement superimposes ideologies foreign to their own values. Thus outcomes are given other names in some states to avoid the controversy. Some controversies add fuel to the growth of private schools throughout the country as well as an increasing political activism by various groups electing to school boards throughout the country individuals who reflect their own values. Jefferson facing political challenges during his campaign for office, refused to be drawn into the debate, and worked to promote separation of church and state during his presidency. Horace Mann worked to avoid controversy with religious leaders of his day and proposed that teachers avoid any discussion or comment that would involve politics.

> ....when the teacher, in the course of his lessons or lectures on the fundamental law, arrives at a controverted text, he is either to read it without comment or remark; or, at most, he is only to say that the passage is the subject of disputation, and that the schoolroom is neither the tribunal to adjudicate, nor the forum to discuss it. (9)

Individuals as Political Animals

As Aristotle noted over 2,000 years ago, individuals are political animals. *Politikverdrossenheit* or disillusionment with politics in education and society is unproductive. Rather the challenge is to use the political bent of individuals to enhance the quality of communication, self esteem and self worth of others. Through political initiatives we can, as Dewey noted, continually reconstruct ourselves and our economic, educational and social institutions in order to improve our democracy. We can build on shared values, on consensus building, on the exciting possibilities of a more open society providing ever more

benefits of the good life to ever more of our citizens. We can learn to be more flexible, to avoid hardening of the categories and to engage in active and reflective listening to the concerns of our ethnic minorities. From theory into practice, we can build a new social order on the rich resources of our diversity. The new social order can be built on compassion, understanding and honoring people where and as they are through one seamless curriculum across generational, and cultural lines. Such a state can make life long learning a reality and let us more fully use our rich human resources, their individuality and their talents to reinvent, recreate, and reenergize our society and its individuals.

We can rediscover trust, appreciate common human values, cherish and celebrate diversity, tap human energy through volunteerism, and seek a unity within diversity.

If not now, when

If not us, who

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